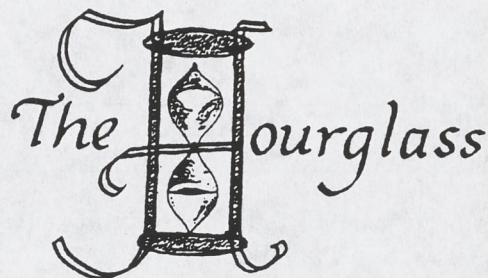


# Historical Society of Palm Desert

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Palm Desert, CA 92260

(619) 346-6588



Community

Service

Collections

Archives

WINTER/SPRING 1997

VOL. 5, NO. 1

## WE HEARD IT FROM THE HONORABLE DICK KELLY, MAYOR OF PALM DESERT

The January luncheon in the Wimbledon Room at Shadow Mountain Resort and Racquet Club was well attended. This was a purely social gathering; however, President Jean Hollenbeck gave a capsulated account of the Society's recent accomplishments. She introduced the seven board members present and also thanked Honorary Board Members, Marian Henderson and Florence Maxwell for their steadfast support.

Mayor Dick Kelly, who was our speaker for the day, was accompanied by his wife, Mary Helen. He gave a spirited report of Palm Desert's assets up to the present: El Paseo, Town Center, McCallum, Civic Center Park, Y.M.C.A., Parks & Rec. Building, Living Desert, \$15 million in storm drains, the new Portola Community Center, and "Gardens on El Paseo" shopping center with 200,000 square feet of retail space and an underground garage in its beginning stage of work. This is an impressive list of accomplishments for a city so young.

Since maintenance and administrative costs come from General Fund money, the city must insure that the income stream will keep up with expenses. The Desert Willow project which includes a golf course, hotels and time-shares is designed to attract conference and tourist trade to help keep Palm Desert solvent. Also, reasonable greens/cart rental fees will be available for city residents who want to play golf there.

The mayor stressed the importance of joint planning achieved by the nine desert cities through the Coachella Valley Association of Governments. At a recent Cal-Trans meeting it was decided to shift their projection from the year 2009 to 2019. His explanation of funding for road and bridge construction and other necessary services made it clear that future valley needs are being addressed. Councilman Walt Snyder and Mayor Kelly, who have worked together for years serving Palm Desert, answered questions from the audience regarding the library, McCallum Theatre and Metro-Link.

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Mrs. Kay H. Olesen

Ruth Elder Hall

Gary L. Hopper, D.D.S.

Thanks to Dolly Olesen and Gary Hopper for renewing in the contributing category. Also, thanks to life member Adele Ruge North for an extra gift this year. Please ask a friend to join. The dues structure is:

Individual	\$15	Patron	\$250
Family	\$20	Life	\$1000
Contributing	\$100	Business/Organization	\$50

HSPD-PUBLICATIONS-NEWSLETTER

00-00-503

W/S 97



Vera S. Arnold

**IN MEMORIAM**

Michael Parsel

Donald C. Pearson

Ruth Elder Hall

Frances A Waggener

Don Pearson's passing reminds us that the whole of Coachella Valley was once a single community. He was active in the Coachella Valley Historical Society and was president of the Coachella Valley Pioneer Society. Don's widow, Frances McCall Pearson, shared his passion for an accurate record of the past. They were supportive of our Society, as well, and Frances has shared memories of family links to the Palm Desert area.

Don's aunt, Susannah Howell, was brought to Coachella in 1901 when she was 13 years old. She came with her uncle and aunt, Charles and Susan McDonald of Michigan. Susannah married Arthur Thomas, a barber, in 1905 and between 1906 and 1928 they had four children: Ray, George, Lillian and Delbert.

In 1907 the McDonalds and the Thomases "took up" land under the Desert Land Act. That land consisted of large acreage northeast of present-day Highway 111, between what are now Portola and Monterey Avenues. Clear title was not achieved until the 1920s. The Thomases planted a wind break of tamarisk along the north and west sides of their property and built a small house for workers. Uncle Mac built a reservoir where Don Pearson along with his brother, sister, and cousin.....Bud, Joyce and John Holliday, would come from Coachella to swim with the Thomas cousins.

Growing conditions were ideal for grapes and various row crops, onions, carrots, lettuce and strawberries. However, hard work and hard luck seems to sum up the story of the agricultural endeavors of this pioneer family. Dad never gave up his barber shop!

Aunt Suzie told Frances of the year they had 1200 crates of absolutely beautiful sweet onions harvested. They were taken to Indio to be shipped by rail, but the market price dropped below the cost of shipping. She said, "The onions were brought back and piled in a rick about fifty feet from the house. At night the rabbits would come and chew and chew on the onions. Really the only thing on which we ever realized any money was some cotton we planted. We took out insurance for \$600. The rabbits ate up the young cotton plants and we got the \$600."

Don's cousin, Ray, was taught to pilot a plane by Sig F. Varian and he did his first soloing in Palm Desert. He would fly his Jenny in from Riverside, use Highway 111 as a landing strip, and push the plane onto the roadside. When he was ready to leave, he would push it back onto the road for take off. "Not much traffic up that way in those days following WWI," Aunt Suzie commented. She died in 1989 at the age of 100.

The family counts itself rich in both humorous and poignant memories. When they sold to King Gillette in 1929, the going rate for 320 acres was \$16,000. That included Art Thomas' well, the pumping plant and the large reservoir built by Uncle Mac.

**PHOTO IDENTIFICATION - you can help!**

Second and fourth Mondays, the 10th and 24th in February, have been designated for this "memory" chore. Pictures will be out for viewing from 10 a.m. till 3 p.m. If these days are not convenient for you, please call Bonnie at 346-6588 to arrange a date. Seen recently remembering the good-old-days were Jeanne Ahrens, Gene Roberts, Dan Callahan and Mary Safe.....among others.



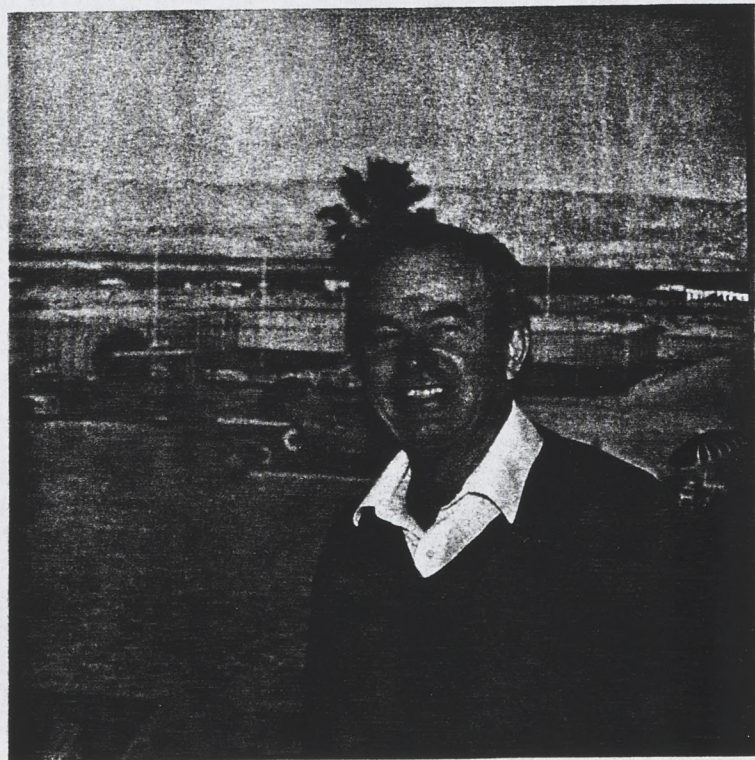
**KAY GARY OLESEN, Vice-President  
Historical Society of Palm Desert**

Being very patriotic my parents, Kay and Dolly Olesen, brought me into this world on June 14 (Flag Day) in Portland, Oregon. When I was five years old and my sister Karen was slightly older, the family moved to Los Angeles where my father was a partner in an aircraft manufacturing company during World War II. His company built parts for the B17, B24 and P38 bombers, as well as balsa wood parts for Howard Hughes' famous "Spruce Goose" seaplane.

After the war my father built up a Chrysler/Dodge auto dealership in Indio and we moved to the Coachella Valley. As there was little housing available, we lived in a motel near Indio. I started my career in the business world at age thirteen working in the parts and service department of our dealership. Later we moved to La Quinta. My mother was upset about the scorpions and rattlesnakes in and around the house, so we then moved to a more civilized place.....Palm Village. This was a great place to grow up. We swam in the town reservoir just a block away and sand dunes were close by.

We had the first Volunteer Fire Department in the Coachella Valley. Bob Keedy, Bill Carr and my dad were the first Fire Chiefs. In the beginning they had a perfect record.... 12 house fires and 12 total losses! On the thirteenth try they saved a house and it still stands today. It was the Velma Dawson house, a two-story former C.O.D. President's residence on the College of the Desert campus. My antics gave the Fire Department some practice. Early one Christmas morning, using a match for light to call the girl next door, the house accidentally caught fire. Subsequently, at various times over a two-year period, date palm trees around our house caught fire. Of course, this was not done intentionally, but it was decided that the Fire Department should be repaid from my weekly allowance for an indefinite period of time. I soon realized that setting fires was not a bright thing to do.

As a member of the first graduating class of George Washington Grammar School in Palm Desert in 1950, I was one of thirteen students who shared a room with the seventh grade. We also started Boy Scout Troop 76 in Palm Desert. The Coachella Valley was our only playground, so most weekends were spent hiking and camping in its many canyons. Coachella Valley Union, located seventeen miles east, was the only high school available to us. The bus would pick us up on the highway; however, getting home was always a problem as we were usually practicing whatever sport was in season after school. This often meant hitching a ride.





**KAY GARY OLESEN (cont'd.)**

In 1956 I graduated from Menlo College, where I played on championship football and track teams and was class president. Later I attended the U.C.L.A. School of Business and was a member of the Beta Theta Pi fraternity. Upon graduation I worked in the family automobile sales business and built houses. After that I worked for Foster and Kleiser Outdoor Advertising as an account executive; then for John Lusk, a conglomerate Orange County developer. Eventually, after returning to the desert, I managed our automobile dealership until we sold the business in 1982.

For the last several years much of my time has been spent in southern Idaho developing land. Also, whenever possible, I enjoy fishing the beautiful streams and hiking the mountains of Sawtooth National Park near Sun Valley which is located in that area.

I am a former board member of the General Patton Museum and, more recently, a board member of the Coachella Valley Education Foundation. Presently, I sit on the board of the Historical Society of Palm Desert. We are looking forward to a successful year of increased membership and activities in our newly renovated headquarters on El Paseo.

**THE FLAG FLIES HIGH AND PROUD**

Had you noticed? The flag is flying at Society headquarters! A sensor for night lighting is a welcome addition.

Landscaping is the next step in the works to enhance the appearance of the Old Fire Station. Board members have been giving opinions on alternate plans featuring drought tolerant plantings. Keep your eye on progress, better still, stop to visit.

Ray House and daughter, Susan, were recent visitors. Susan, a teacher in Redlands on the 12-month plan, is off to Antarctica for three weeks.

Secretary, Bonnie Bowie, hangs the "OPEN" sign out three days a week, Mon./Tues./Thurs. from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

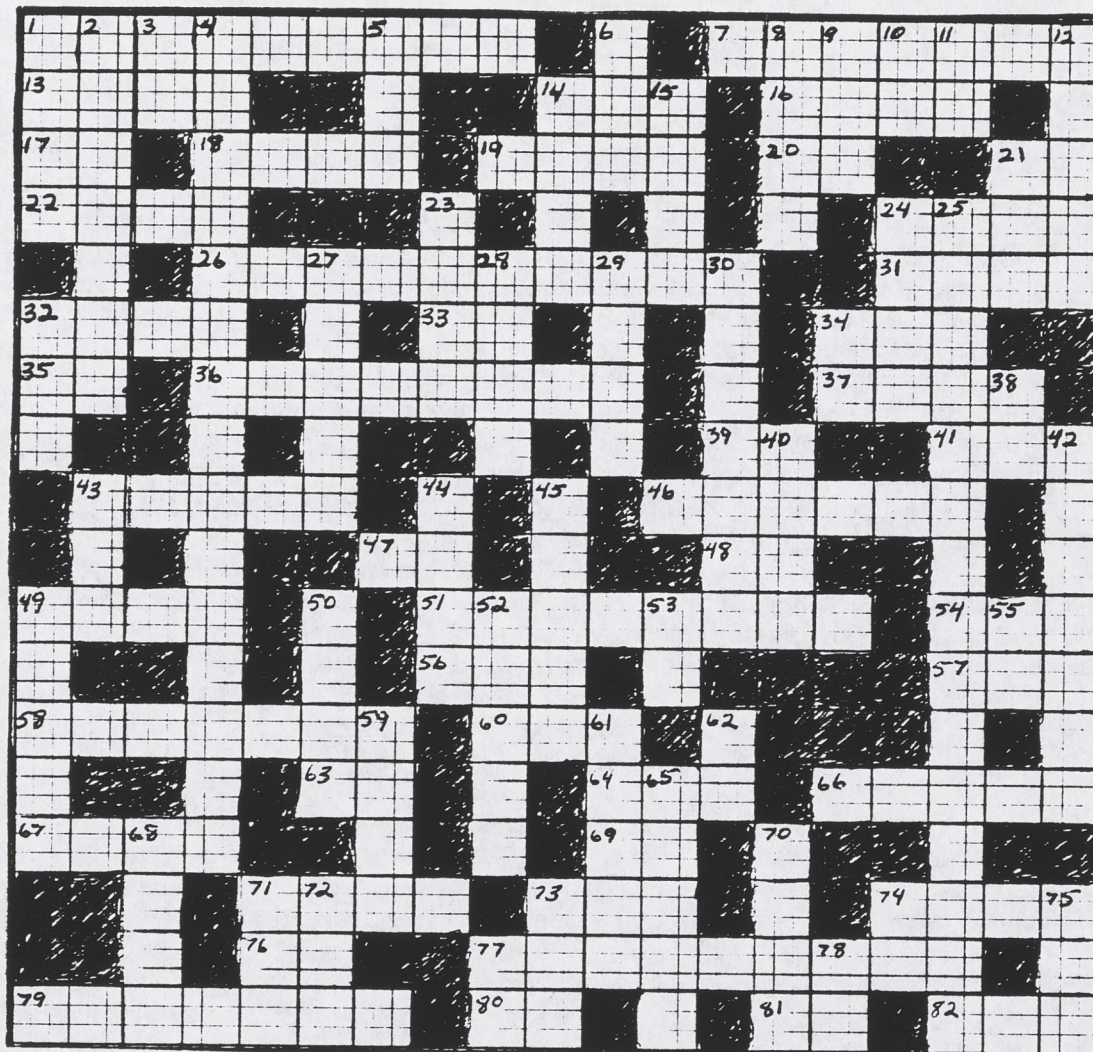
**IN THE PALM OF GOD'S HAND**

An interesting gift has been received from Jeannette Yoxsimer, a charter member of our Society. It is an artist's depiction of the Coachella Valley titled "The Palm of God's Hand," done in 1946 by J'Ambly, a friend of Jackie Cochran. That title follows the Indian designation for our marvelous valley. Overlooked as it is by the Santa Rosas, the San Jacintos and the little San Bernardinos, the Indians called it "la palma de la mano de Dios." Clifford Henderson suggested that more interest could be created in this map/poster if local attractions were imprinted on it. Thus, Palm Desert and the Shadow Mountain Club came to be prominently featured.

Jeanette was formerly the secretary for the Palm Desert Corporation. She had this work laminated as a wall hanging. We thank her for her generosity.



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ACROSS

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|---------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 Founding family         | 47 Lung disease    |
| 7 Pharmacist              | 48 City of angels  |
| 13 Healing plant          | 49 Wal or K        |
| 14 Garden tool            | 51 Desert plant    |
| 16 Juncture               | 54 Elect. unit     |
| 17 Over                   | 56 Bldg. additions |
| 18 Bridge                 | 57 Not many        |
| 19 Realtor                | 58 Ball chasers    |
| 20 Mix up                 | 60 Like (suf.)     |
| 21 Myself                 | 63 Dist. Att.      |
| 22 Tardy                  | 64 Cooling drink   |
| 24 Scrutinize             | 66 Restaurateur    |
| 26 Fast bird              | 67 Realtor Bro     |
| 31 Classic's star         | 69 CA metropolis   |
| 32 Gnat                   | 71 Heed            |
| 33 Among                  | 73 Torrid          |
| 34 Sun                    | 74 Where sun sets  |
| 35 As far as              | 76 Sun god         |
| 36 Structure              | 77 Early hotel     |
| 37 Pony game              | 79 Owner           |
| 39 Act                    | (see 77 across)    |
| 41 Being                  | 80 Either          |
| 43 Courageous             | 81 You (slang)     |
| 46 Pennsylvanians' leader | 82 Child's game    |

DOWN

- |                          |                               |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 Tote                   | 40 Spoken                     |
| 2 Haute Street           | 42 Desert author              |
| 3 Negative               | 43 Bikini top                 |
| 4 Envir. Org.            | 44 Musical instrument         |
| 5 Sky orb                | 45 Cahuilla Hills landmark    |
| 6 Lid                    | 49 Slight-of-hand             |
| 8 Govt. fac.             | 50 Ex-Pres. of US             |
| 9 Garland                | 52 Flier Bro                  |
| 10 Tra-la—               | 53 Unless                     |
| 11 I am (contr.)         | 55 Him                        |
| 12 View                  | 59 Gratify                    |
| 14 Town Center developer | 61 Aura                       |
| 15 Sword                 | 62 Exist                      |
| 21 Chart                 | 65 Palm fruit                 |
| 23 Dry                   | 68 Toll                       |
| 24 Scat                  | 70 Early gift/card shop owner |
| 25 C.O.D.                | 71 Tennis great               |
| 27 Quick                 | 72 Furry flier                |
| 28 One                   | 73 She                        |
| 29 Badgers               | 74 Within (abbr.)             |
| 30 Publisher Bro         | 75 Apparel                    |
| 32 School org.           | 77 Part of mus. scale         |
| 34 Language (abbr.)      | 78 Drinkers' org.             |
| 38 Above                 |                               |

VF



**NEXT - The Monthly Lifestyle Magazine**

Writers for NEXT, the Desert Sun monthly magazine, are pleasing readers with delightful desert memories. The Kaleidoscope and Showcase sections have had articles on the Coachella Valley Museum and Cultural Center in Indio and the Racquet Club and the Palm Springs Tennis Club, both Palm Springs institutions.

Also, in recent issues talented free-lance writer, DeAnn Lubell, has mined the recollections of two prominent members of our Society. December had Marian Marsh Henderson's memories of the 20s and 30s. As a girl, she hiked the canyons and mountains of Coachella Valley with her brother, Tony. Later, after movie stardom, she often vacationed at the El Mirador Hotel in Palm Springs. She shares the glamor and excitement of being part of the Hollywood set.

The January issue covers Ed Mullins and his memories of Bill Boyd, famous movie and television star of the 40s and 50s, also known as "Hopalong Cassidy." Ed remembers Bill and his wife, Grace, who gained the nickname, "Tripalong." They often came to Ed's pharmacy. Hopalong passed out wooden coins to the children with his name and picture on them.

Doloris Driskel asks, "Does anyone have a "Hoppy coin" to give to the Historical Society?" We would add it to our treasures.

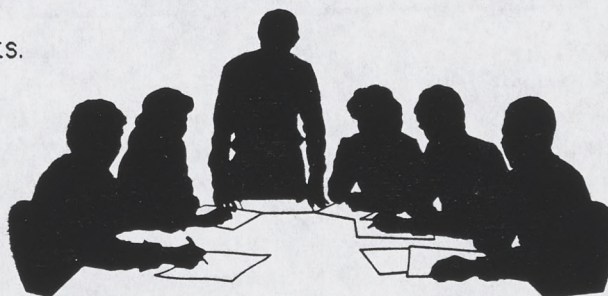
**Agenda items for upcoming February Board meeting**

- 1) Extending membership campaign to increase business membership.
- 2) A spring get-together for members and friends...stay tuned for more on this. \*
- 3) Founder's Day, always in May. Marian Henderson presents this special recognition program, a high light of spring.

\* For ticketed events, please remember that a reservation made is a reservation paid. We need to hear from those who reserved for the January luncheon but did not come or cancel.

Invitations will be mailed for all events.

Hourglass Editor,  
Theda Lundquist



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